

CHAPTER H

POLITICS, 1376-187?

THE GOOD PARLIAMENT. THE RECOVERY OF POWER BY
JOHN OF GAUNT. THE TRIAL OF WYCLIFFE. THE
DEATH OF EDWARD THE THIRD

DURING the reigns of the later Plantagenets, one principle of the Constitution was more fully appreciated and more rigorously obeyed than in the days of the Tudor and Stuart dynasties. Not Richard the Second in the wildest fit of his insolence, or John of Gaunt in the haughtiest pride of his power, ever dared to impose unauthorised taxes on the subject without the consent of the Estates of the Realm. In the early summer of 1376 an empty exchequer at length compelled the Privy Council to summon the Good Parliament, with misgivings akin to those with which the ministers of Charles the First, under the same compulsion, summoned together a greater assembly, and called down on themselves a more terrible retribution. During the last week of April, London and Westminster were alive with preparations. In the Abbey the monks prepared their Chapter-house for the use of the Commons; in the streets of the city long trains of retainers and gentlemen clattered past admiring throngs, up to the doors of private mansions where the great nobles held their courts. The knights of the shires took up their quarters with friends, or in the public inns that even then were famous for their comfort, while the representatives of a hundred cities of England were entertained and awed by the unrivalled hospitality of the burghers of London. Hosts and guests, Lords and Commons, were during these days busily engaged in plotting a combined attack of all classes on the